



STANDARDS ARE THE PROMISE

Understanding the Head Start Program Performance Standards
and the Head Start Act

Why They Matter Every Day



BEFORE WE BEGIN

Think about one child or family whose life was changed because of Head Start/Early Head Start.

- What happened?
- How did Head Start/Early Head Start make a difference?



HEAD START CHANGES LIVES

Behind every success story is a promise we made to children and families. Head Start WORKS. We can prove it!



WHY DO WE HAVE STANDARDS?

Without standards...

Programs would all look different.
Children would receive different services.
Families would have different experiences.
Quality would depend on luck.



Instead... Every child and family deserves the same commitment to excellence.

Standards protect children, families, and quality.

WHAT ARE THE HEAD START PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS?

The Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are the federal requirements that define what high-quality Head Start and Early Head Start programs must provide. They establish expectations for:

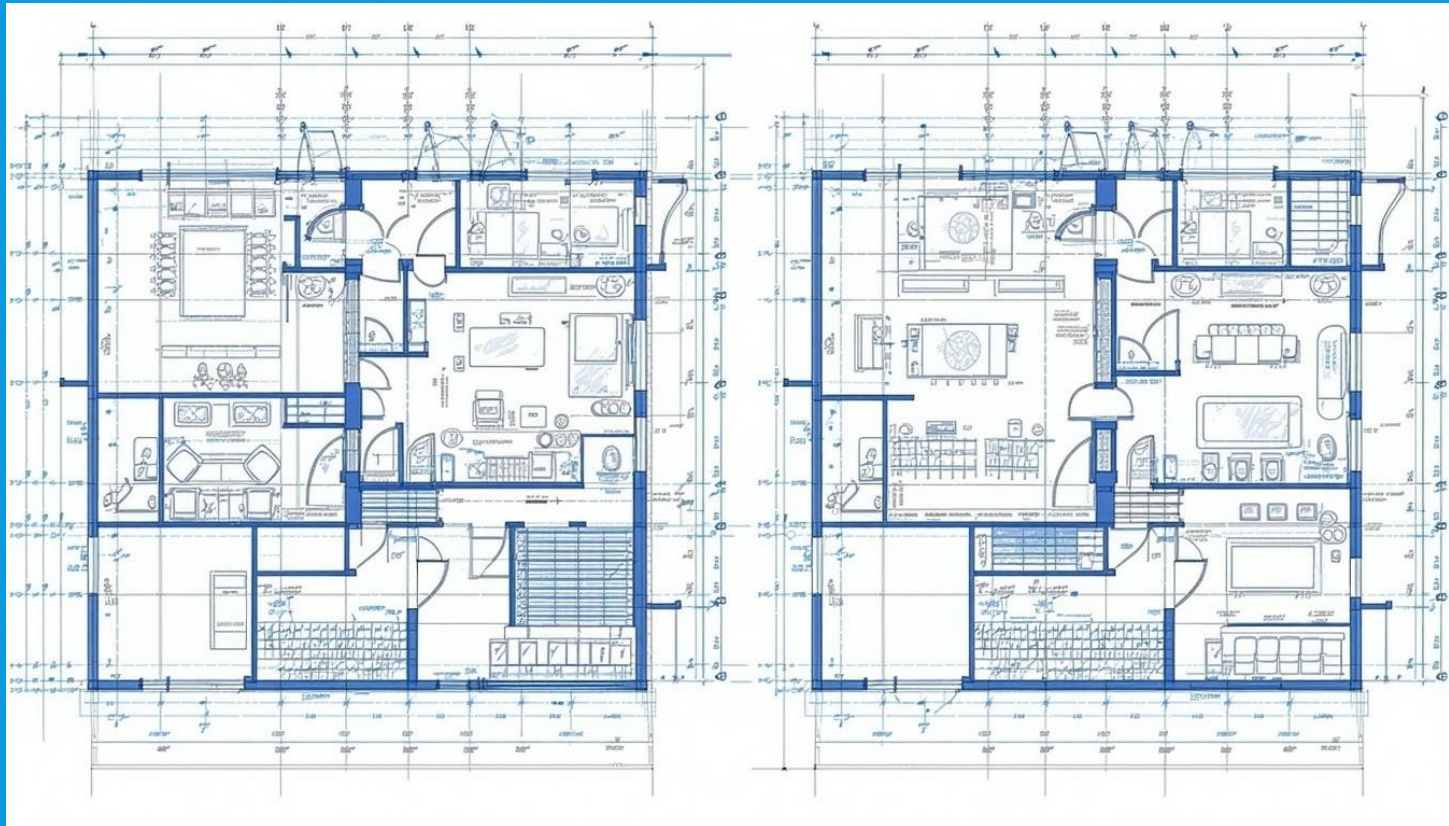
- ✓ Education
- ✓ Family Engagement
- ✓ Disabilities
- ✓ Transportation
- ✓ Governance
- ✓ Staff Qualifications
- ✓ Policy Council
- ✓ Health
- ✓ Nutrition
- ✓ Mental Health
- ✓ Safety
- ✓ Fiscal Accountability

HEAD START PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS (HSPPS): THE OPERATIONAL REGULATION

- The Head Start Program Performance Standards are the federal regulations that dictate the day-to-day operations and service delivery requirements . [Head Start Program Performance Standards](#)
- While the Act provides the legal authority, the Standards provide the actual technical requirements that programs must meet to remain in compliance .
 - Role: They translate the broad mandates of the Act into actionable, measurable requirements covering areas such as education, child health and safety, family engagement, and financial management .
 - Purpose: They ensure that every Head Start program—regardless of location or provider—meets a uniform baseline of quality and accountability.
 - Enforcement: These standards are what regulators use to assess a program's performance during monitoring reviews .

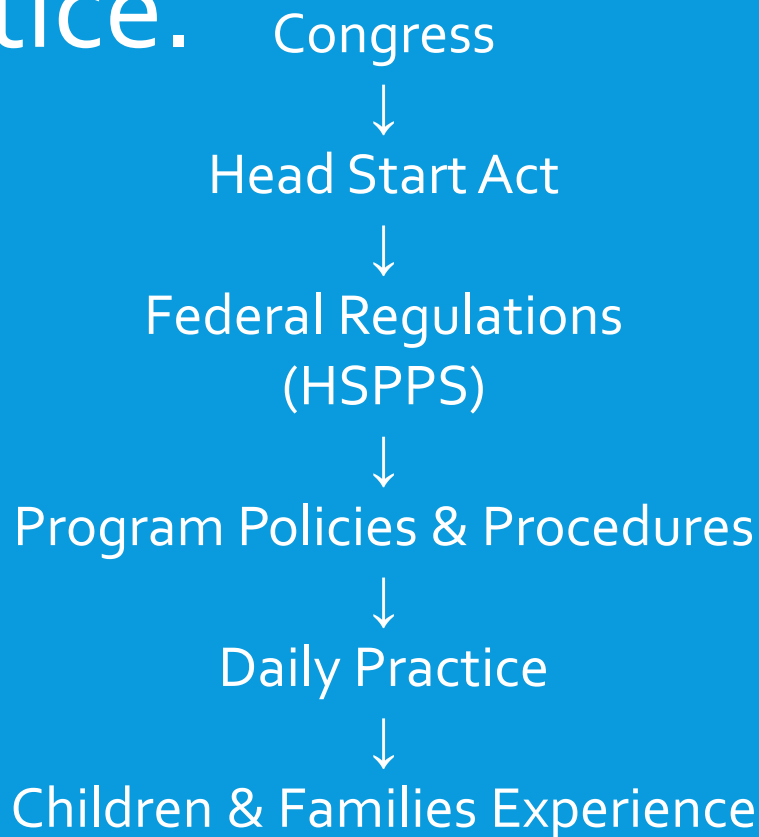
THE BLUEPRINT = THE STANDARDS

People build the house; standards are the blueprint.



FROM CONGRESS TO THE CLASSROOM

Head Start Act → HSPPS → Policies → Practice.

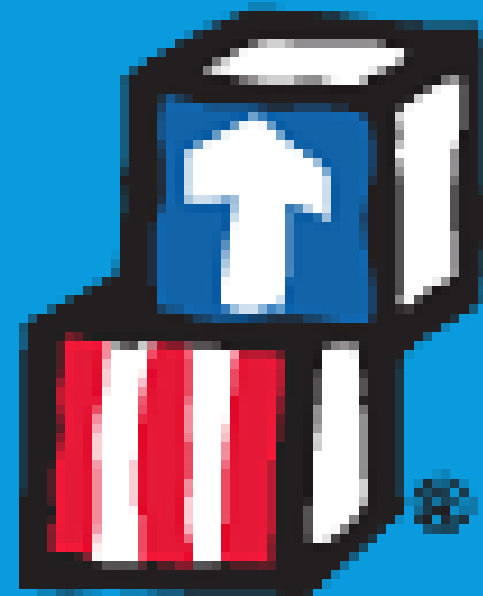


THE HEAD START ACT

The statutory foundation of Head Start
Congress established Head Start in 1965
[Head Start Act](#)

The Head Start Act describes:

- ✓ Purpose
- ✓ Eligibility
- ✓ Funding
- ✓ Governance
- ✓ Comprehensive Services
- ✓ Federal Oversight



THE HEAD START ACT: THE LEGISLATIVE FOUNDATION

The Head Start Act is federal legislation enacted by Congress. It provides the legal authority for the existence of the Head Start program.

- **Role:** It establishes the program's mission, authorizes funding, defines who is eligible for services, and outlines the broad administrative structures (such as the role of the Office of Head Start and the requirement for local governing bodies).
- **Purpose:** It functions as the "law of the land" for the program. Congress can amend the Act to update priorities, funding levels, or structural mandates.
- **Mandate:** Crucially, the Act contains specific sections (such as Section 641A) that mandate the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop and implement the Program Performance Standards.



HOW QUALITY IS IMPLEMENTED CONSISTENTLY

The Standards answer

HOW

How do we deliver quality?
How do we ensure consistency?
How do we protect children?
How do we support families?

Act = Vision

Standards = Implementation



HEAD START ACT VS. HSPPS

Feature	Head Start Act	Head Start Program Performance Standards
Nature	Legislative (Law/Statute)	Regulatory (Rule/Requirement)
Origin	Created by Congress	Created by the Department of Health & Human Services
Primary Goal	Authorizes existence, mission, and funding	Defines operational and quality standards
Scope	Broad, structural, and legal framework	Technical, specific, and operational
Relationship	The mandate (the "What")	The implementation (the "How")

EVERY STANDARD HAS A PURPOSE

What problem was this standard designed to solve?

Standard

Health screenings

Family partnership

Developmental screening

Professional development

Governance

Why It Exists

Identify concerns early

Parents know their child best

Early intervention

Better teaching

Accountability

THE HEAD START DOMINO EFFECT

A 3-year-old arrives at Head Start having difficulty communicating.

What happens next?

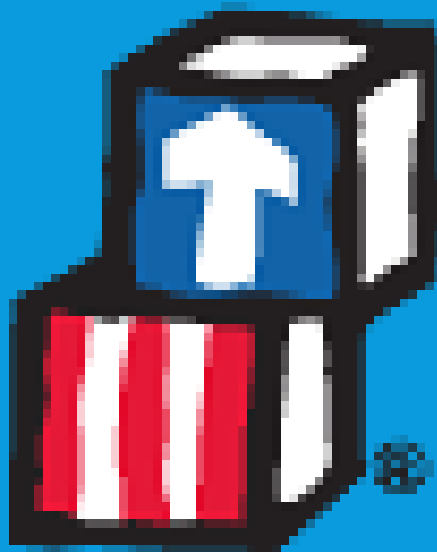
How many different Head Start systems just touched this child's life?



EVERY JOB MATTERS: WHERE DO I FIT?

Everyone implements the standards. If you work in Head Start/Early Head Start, the standards are part of your job.

What does my job have to do with the HSPPS?





WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- If a standard disappeared tomorrow, what might change?
- Standards create a floor. Without a floor, quality can become dependent on geography, funding, leadership, or circumstance.

THE FUTURE OF THE STANDARDS

Newser – July 31, 2026 Administration Plans to Gut Head Start's Defining Standards

**New America (July 2026)
"The Quiet Dismantling of Head Start: How the Trump Administration Is Using Regulation to Reshape a Program It Can't Eliminate"**

- **EdSource – July 20, 2026 Trump administration reportedly considering significant changes to Head Start eligibility**

The Seattle Times – July 31, 2026 Trump administration plans to upend Head Start by deregulating it

Newsmax – July 31, 2026 Trump Moves to Pare Head Start Rules, Says States Should Have More Control

**THE NATION - JULY 30, 2026
A New Trump Rule Would Lower Standards at Head Start and Exclude Immigrants From the Program**

**The Bulwark – July 19, 2026 Exclusive:
Trump Preparing a New Attack on Head Start The administration is considering a proposal to gut the program's instructional standards while adding new restrictions tied to immigration.**

IMAGINE HEAD START WITHOUT...

Imagine Head Start Without...

- Mental Health
- Health Services
- Family Partnerships
- Governance
- Professional Development
- Disability Services
- Community Collaboration



WE ARE THE STANDARDS



When a family walks through your door, what do you want them to experience?

Because every child deserves:

- To be safe.
- To be healthy.
- To be seen.
- To be heard.
- To be included.
- To be supported.
- To have their family engaged.
- To have every opportunity to thrive.

And every family deserves:

- A voice.
- Respect.
- Partnership.
- Support.
- Opportunity.

The Head Start Program Performance Standards help make those promises real.

THE STANDARDS MATTER

The Head Start Program Performance Standards are more than regulations.

- ✓ They are our commitment to children.
- ✓ They are our promise to families.
- ✓ They are the blueprint for quality.
- ✓ Most importantly... They are brought to life by YOU.



AMERICA STARTS WITH HEAD START

Call to Action

If Head Start has touched your life, this is your moment to tell the story. Movements begin when ordinary people decide that something extraordinary is worth protecting.



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